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STATEMENT OF
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FOR CONSERVATION, RESEARCH, AND EDUCATION
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Before the House Interior Subcommittee on Public Lands
and the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Forests
United States House of Representatives

On the Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE II)
Conducted by the Forest Service, USDA

FEBRUARY 14, 1979

MR. CHAIRMEN, AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEES:

I am pleased to have this opportunity to review with you the Department of Agriculture's RARE II recommendations and the process we used to allocate roadless areas.

RARE II was carried out to promptly allocate most of the National Forest roadless areas either to wilderness or to other uses provided for in the Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act of 1960. Delays in the preparation and adoption of land use plans, due in part to administrative appeals and litigation, have made difficult the effective management of this roadless area resource and adjacent roaded National Forest land. The Department concluded early in 1977 that, if decisions were not made soon on the allocation of these roadless areas, some of the opportunities identified through the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act process would be diminished or postponed indefinitely, and that the sum of benefits and services to the American people from the National Forest System would be the less for it. The Department also concluded that it was time to propose the designation of additional wilderness areas to round out the contribution of the National Forest System to the National Wilderness Preservation System.

Background

Filing of the RARE II final environmental statement on January 4 of this year climaxed a year and a half of intensive work to assess the values and determine the most appropriate uses of over 62 million acres of National Forest System land. To summarize this effort:

Passage of the 1964 Wilderness Act converted 9.1 million acres of Forest Service wilderness and wild areas to statutory wilderness. The Forest Service then undertook the review of 5.4 million acres of administratively established primitive areas as mandated by that Act. As the primitive area reviews, and the resulting reports to the Congress as to the suitability of the primitive areas for wilderness status, were nearing completion, the Forest Service in 1971 initiated a roadless area review and evaluation (RARE) process to determine which National Forest System areas in addition to the primitive areas also should be committed to wilderness study. These "de facto wilderness" areas were being proposed for statutory wilderness designation by citizen groups on a piecemeal basis, and the Forest Service saw the need for a comprehensive review in order to be able to respond to citizen proposals and related congressional requests for recommendations. This original RARE effort focused on the western National Forests. It did not identify many areas in the eastern National Forests or in the National Grasslands. RARE I resulted in the selection and temporary setting aside of 12.3 million acres in 274 different areas for wilderness study. Through land management planning, the Forest Service began to analyze in detail the potential of each of these areas for wilderness and other uses.

By the time I was confirmed as Assistant Secretary early in 1977, it had become apparent to me and many others that this process wasn't

entirely satisfactory--that this slow, piecemeal allocation of roadless areas probably wasn't the best way to determine their "best" use. So, at my direction, the Forest Service went back to the drawing board with a second, improved Roadless Area Review and Evaluation immediately dubbed RARE II, which was intended to be both more comprehensive and more decisive than its predecessor.

First step was to inventory all the roadless and undeveloped areas in the entire National Forest System. During the summer of 1977, the Forest Service compiled a list of the roadless and undeveloped areas it could readily identify in the National Forests and National Grasslands. More than 50,000 persons responded to the agency's request for suggested wilderness criteria and additions and deletions to the lists. Refined by this public comment, the inventory of roadless areas in the National Forest System was published in The Federal Register on November 18, 1977. The 2,686 areas were then evaluated and a draft environmental impact statement was released, on June 15, 1978, for further public review and comment. We received comments from 359,414 people, who stated their preferences as to how specific areas should be allocated or suggested approaches and criteria we should use in arriving at our final decisions and recommendations. This public response was a key element in the process by which we reached agreement within the USDA on the proposed action contained in the final environmental impact statement.

Other important elements included the wilderness attributes of individual areas and their potential to contribute to the achievement of the 1975 RPA resource output goals. We sought to recognize the national interest, as well as local needs and possible effects on local economies and community stability.

Mineral resource ratings and development costs of individual roadless areas were used to calculate resource trade-offs. A development opportunity rating system (DORS) was used to determine the relative cost effectiveness of nonwilderness management for each roadless area.

While areas with high wilderness attributes and low resource trade-offs were sought for wilderness, it was necessary to relate wilderness allocations to an overall National Wilderness Preservation System and the ultimate shape of that system. There was also a need to take a national look at the trade-offs involved in the allocation of these areas--the effects of any allocation on other resource values, and our ability to meet long-range resource goals.

We combined professional evaluation of the area evaluation data and the advice and counsel of thousands of people inside and outside of the Department to come up with the Secretary's proposed action to allocate these 62 million acres of roadless areas, and the proposed action is this:

- o Fifteen million acres would be recommended to the 96th Congress for immediate designation as new units or additions to existing units of the National Wilderness Preservation System. In recommended areas, no activities which might alter wilderness qualities of the land will be allowed, unless permitted by law or prior rights.
- o A little over 36 million acres would be managed for multiple uses other than wilderness, ranging from extensive uses with minimal impact--such as wildlife habitat improvements and range productivity enhancement--to more intensive activities, such as timber harvesting, motorized recreation opportunities, and water developments.

These areas will become available for such activities on April 15, 1979. Entry for nonwilderness-type activities and development will be described and controlled by existing or future land and resource management plans and in some instances special project plans. These plans may permit harvest and other management activities involving timber.

- o Allocation of some 10.8 million acres would be determined by further planning which will consider all appropriate uses including wilderness. Land uses for most of these areas will be determined through National Forest land use plans which we expect to complete by 1985. These areas will remain essentially undeveloped until forest land and resource management plans, as prescribed by Section 6 of the National Forest Management Act, or other specific project plans meeting National Environmental Policy Act requirements are completed. Exploration and leasing for oil and gas will be permitted under rigid stipulations as described in the final environmental impact statement. No harvesting of timber will be allowed in these areas other than for emergency reasons, but standing timber on commercial forest land in the areas will be used to determine potential yield.

Effects of Implementation

I believe implementation of the actions proposed in the final environmental impact statement on RARE II will allow for both a steady flow of goods and services from National Forest System lands and for important strengthening of the National Wilderness Preservation System.

The allocation of some roadless areas to wilderness will provide additional ecosystem, landform and wildlife habitat representations

within the Wilderness System, thereby adding to the diversity of that system. The distribution and accessibility of roadless areas recommended for wilderness will increase the opportunity for a wilderness experience within a day's travel time of most of the Nation's population. For example, the number of wildernesses in the populous eastern States would increase by more than four times.

When we compare 1975 RPA program targets with our RARE II recommendations, we find that all program targets can be met or exceeded with the exception of sawtimber sale offerings, which fall slightly short of the 1985 mid-level target.

Forest Service timber sale offerings have averaged 11.5 billion board feet over the past three years. Within the next three to five years the effect on this timber sale program of designating the wilderness proposed by RARE II and holding some areas for further planning would be to reduce the annual sale by about 150 million board feet of sawtimber and 25 million board feet of other products--less than a 2 percent reduction. This shortfall is essentially in Alaska. In the lower 48 States there could be a slight increase in annual sales. This results from release of areas where harvesting has been deferred for wilderness study.

The timber sale program level for FY 1980 probably will not be affected by RARE II proposed action. Preliminary analysis indicates that implementation of the RARE II proposed action would cause only minor reductions, if any, in the FY 1981 sales program. This is being verified by our field people as they prepare their five-year programs.

This estimate of RARE II's impact on timber sales is based on the assumption that the roadless areas recommended for uses other than wilderness will be available after April 15. Should areas not be available at that time, some further reductions in the sales program would occur. The size of that reduction depends on the number of areas affected and when they become available for uses other than wilderness.

In summary, the effect of all proposed roadless area allocations on our ability to meet the 1985 mid-level RPA sawtimber sale target of 13.9 billion board feet is reduced by 400 million board feet; the proposal permits achievement of over 97 percent of the RPA goal for timber. Actual sale levels will be dependent on economic considerations and other factors. Our RARE II "Development Opportunity Cost" analyses indicate that intensive forestry would not be cost effective in much of the 26 million acres recommended by RARE II for wilderness or further planning.

If the Wilderness System additions proposed in RARE II final environmental statement are made, there would be a reduction of about 1.2 billion board feet in the long-term potential yield. The reduction would be 1.0 billion board feet, if Alaska is excluded.

There has been some thought that setting aside wilderness areas would not reduce timber harvesting potential if the money that would have been spent to build roads into these roadless areas were used instead for intensive management to increase the harvest on the remaining lands. A study was conducted to see if this would occur. We called it the Roadless Area Tradeoff Study. Generally, the answer was no, the tradeoff would not work because of environmental constraints and other multiple-use considerations.

There are other aspects to the timber supply situation, of course, including the potential of increased wood utilization efficiency. Research

has developed particleboards, flakeboards, and fiberboards that can use fiber from logging residues and scientists are working on the harvesting systems for recovering this wood without damaging the environment. We can also increase timber supply by increasing growth through silvicultural practices.

In summary, the effect of our proposed RARE II roadless area allocations on the National Forest timber sale program is not substantial: in fact, the immediate effect in the lower 48 States is to increase the availability of timber products.

Secretary Bob Bergland has asked governors and members of Congress for their reactions to the Department's proposal. Concurrently, our recommendations are being reviewed by other Federal agencies. We initially asked for their comments by February 28. This deadline has been extended to March 15. These comments will be used as the basis of a final adjustment of our RARE II recommendations prior to interagency review and the development of a consensus among representatives of the several interested departments, agencies and the White House on a proposal to send to the President, for his approval and transmission to the Congress with a recommendation for action.

This concludes my summary of RARE II. I would be happy to respond to your questions.

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